

Representative
MARK SCHOESLER

Representative
DON COX

9th District • 2003 Session Outlook and Survey

Serving Asotin, Garfield, Franklin, Adams, Whitman and south Spokane counties

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February 2003

Dear Friends,

The 58th Legislature convened Jan. 13 amid grim predictions that the scheduled 105-day session would be among the most difficult in state history. Topping the agenda are the challenges of revitalizing a faltering state economy and closing a record \$2.4 billion budget deficit.

In addition to balancing the budget without tax increases, the key to putting Washington back on the road to economic recovery is changing the state's hostile business climate to one that attracts new companies, encourages business growth and gets people back to work. An important element in achieving that goal is to reduce the burdensome bureaucracy, red tape and regulations that strangle economic vitality.

Throughout the process, it's going to take disciplined budget-writing, leadership and political courage to forge policies that will stabilize and energize the economy, strengthen the business climate and create the new jobs we need.

Transportation, agriculture, health care, education, and restoring public trust in government are other issues that will have a prominent role in the months ahead.

This newsletter includes a brief questionnaire on some topics we believe are of interest to citizens in our district. We hope you will take a few minutes to complete and return the survey. Your thoughts and opinions will help guide our decisions in the months ahead.

If you have questions or other concerns to share with us this session, please call or write a letter. Rep. Schoesler's office has been moved to what's known as **Modular 1**, and Rep. Cox has relocated to 403 John L. O'Brien Building, but our phone numbers and E-mail addresses are unchanged. We are always glad to hear from you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Mark Schoesler".

MARK SCHOESLER
State Representative

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Don Cox".

DON COX
State Representative

Representative
MARK SCHOESLER

Representative
DON COX

■ **Balancing the budget**

When the Legislature convened last month, lawmakers were confronted with the challenge of closing a \$2.4 billion budget shortfall – a record deficit, and the overriding issue of the 2003 session.

Since 1999, we have warned that one-time grabs to balance the budget would set taxpayers up for cuts in services, tax hikes, or both. Gimmickry like last year's ill-conceived scheme to tap into the state's tobacco settlement only pushed the deficit into the future, and now the bill has come due.

In his State of the State address Jan. 14, Gov. Locke sounded a theme of “sacrifice, discipline and restraint.” Government that lives within its means is an encouraging starting point, and Locke's approach to addressing the state's financial crisis blends well with the goals of the district. Without question, there are tough and painful decisions ahead, but with disciplined budgeting, political courage and effective leadership, we can forge a responsible, sustainable budget *without a tax increase* and put the state back on the road to recovery, economic strength and stability.

Coupled with a mounting deficit, unemployment in Washington has edged up to 6.8 percent, a reflection of a worsening economic crisis. Even more painful, forecasters don't expect the employment picture to improve any time soon.

Encouraging business growth and creating new jobs

A key to revitalizing our struggling economy is reshaping the state's hostile business climate to make Washington appealing to new-business development. The essential first step toward that goal is to reduce the government bureaucracy, red tape and excessive regulations that strangle economic growth and new job opportunities. We cannot afford to lose opportunities to attract new companies and jobs to the state, but Washington's burdensome regulatory bureaucracy actually discourages companies from starting, growing and providing the new jobs we need.

Bringing jobs and prosperity to Washington families is our number-one priority for the next two years. Since 1999, Washington has lost 160,000 jobs – almost the population of Vancouver. This session, we will support a series of reforms to promote economic growth and create jobs. Our goal is to get back to where we were by

creating 160,000 new private-sector jobs in the next three years.

With Democrats in the majority in the House and a Republican majority in the Senate, the two chambers must find common ground on the budget – a sobering reality in what will certainly be a tough session. As daunting as the challenges ahead of us may be, the 2003 session also presents historic opportunities for bipartisan collaboration and statesmanship to close the deficit, revitalize the economy, rebuild public trust and mend the relationship between government and the people it serves.



Rep. Schoesler was reappointed ranking Republican on the Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee. The Ritzville lawmaker, farmer and rancher took the oath of office Jan. 13 to begin his sixth term representing the 9th District.

2003 Session Outlook and Survey

■ Transportation

“Five Reforms That Make Cents”



In the second week of the session, the House Republican Caucus unveiled an innovative and resourceful transportation package that would tie the passage of five reform bills to a 5-cent increase in gas and diesel tax.

The **“Five For Five”** proposal would trigger a one-cent increase in the gas tax for each accountability measure that is implemented. If any of the five measures fails to win legislative approval or is vetoed by the governor, the result would be one less penny in the gas tax increase. This approach is 180 degrees different from Referendum 51, which was rejected at the polls because voters don’t trust government to spend tax dollars effectively and efficiently.

Our proposal, which would raise about \$2.5 billion in bonds for roads and highways, includes substantial reforms and accountability measures unlike those the Legislature has offered before – reforms that citizens are demanding to ensure that transportation dollars are spent wisely and efficiently.

The **“Five For Five”** package would:

- ▶ Streamline the permitting process for transportation projects.
- ▶ Allow the state to contract out some design and engineering work to private companies.
- ▶ Apply the state-set prevailing-wage law only to projects over \$250,000 and in areas with populations of 75,000 or more.
- ▶ Authorize private-sector operation of passenger-only ferries.
- ▶ Require performance audits of the Department of Transportation.

The proposal also would eliminate the citizen Transportation Commission and shift the decision-making authority to the bipartisan Legislative Transportation Committee. This is a common-sense move that would strengthen the Legislature’s oversight of transportation and ensure greater accountability.



Rep. Cox brings more than 35 years experience as a teacher, counselor and public-school administrator to his role as ranking Republican on the Higher Education Committee. Don is serving his third term as a member of the 9th District legislative team.

We hope our legislative colleagues and the governor will join with us in a serious commitment to improve efficiency and accountability, and to build back the people’s trust. The citizens of Washington want — and deserve — leadership and results from this Legislature.

■ Agriculture and water

House Republicans have introduced an 11-bill package of legislation proposing a wide range of water policy changes. The centerpiece of the package is a 37-page “omnibus” measure sponsored by Rep. Schoesler.

The water-resource bills proposed by the governor focus primarily on municipalities, and agriculture stakeholders were left wondering where the issues they’re most concerned about would fit in. We are offering a comprehensive package that would establish common-sense changes in the state’s water management laws. Our proposals address such issues as the Department of Ecology’s “use it or lose it” policy (also known as relinquishment), permitting requirements, consumptive use and stock watering. The omnibus bill (**HB 1538**) and the other measures in the package are aimed at more clearly and specifically defining the department’s authority in the way it administers water rights.

9th District Constituent Survey

Budget

1. Please rank, in order of preference, the following solutions to fixing the state budget.

- ☐ A. Raise taxes
- ☐ B. Cut government services
- ☐ C. Reduce government waste
- ☐ D. Have State Auditor Brian Sonntag audit government agencies to fix poorly performing programs and save money
- ☐ E. Digitize large portions of government functions – such as human resources management, all permit processes and other potential services

Transportation

1. Did you vote for or against Referendum 51 (statewide transportation funding)?

- ☐ A. For
- ☐ B. Against

2. If you voted against it, why? (Please mark only one selection)

- ☐ A. It cost too much
- ☐ B. It didn't provide enough money to really fix our transportation problems
- ☐ C. There is still too much waste in our transportation system
- ☐ D. It focused too much on roads
- ☐ E. It focused too much on transit

3. Since Referendum 51 wasn't approved by Washington voters, what should the Legislature do to address the state's transportation problems?

- ☐ A. Send a modified statewide transportation plan to Washington voters in 2003
- ☐ B. Pass a modified plan in Olympia without giving voters the final say
- ☐ C. Do nothing
- ☐ D. Find a new and different solution

Income tax

1. Are you in favor of creating a state income tax?

- ☐ A. Yes
- ☐ B. No

Higher Education

1. Currently, there is no stable, long-term funding system for Washington's public colleges and universities. As a result, the level of higher education funding in our state has declined in recent years, shifting more of the cost of higher education to students. Should the state implement a long-term funding plan for our higher education system?

- ☐ A. Yes
- ☐ B. No

2. Because of a severe state operating budget problem, the Legislature allowed institutions to raise tuition rates between 12 percent (community and technical colleges) and 16 percent (University of Washington and Washington State University).

Which of the following best matches your opinion on this issue?

- ☐ A. The tuition increases are justified in light of the state's overall budget problem
- ☐ B. It isn't fair to students and parents to raise tuition rates when the economy is in poor shape

State Parks

1. One solution to help save our state parks is to charge a parking fee to users. How much should the parking fee cost?

- ☐ A. No charge
- ☐ B. \$5
- ☐ C. \$10
- ☐ D. \$15
- ☐ E. Charge a minimal day use fee and offer a yearly fee
- ☐ F. Find another solution to pay for state parks

After completing this questionnaire, please cut and remove this page, fold, affix stamp and mail back to us.



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stamp
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Representatives Mark Schoesler and Don Cox
P.O. Box 40600
Olympia, Washington 98504-0600

Representative MARK SCHOESLER	Representative DON COX
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■ **K12 Education**

Quality education is the key to every child’s success. Providing every student with a quality education continues to be a major priority for the 9th District legislative team. We are very concerned that the governor’s budget proposal simply won’t begin to get the job done. Gov. Locke’s proposal would hurt rural schools and appears to have been created only to help Puget Sound region school districts. It includes drastic cuts to Education Service District funding and raises the levy lid, both of which would be disastrous for smaller rural schools. In addition, it would reduce levy equalization funding. We are also troubled by the fact that it would permit a simple majority of voters to pass local school levies. This would hurt rural areas and smaller communities that cannot afford the same level of levy funding as richer districts.

As budget talks heat up in the coming months, we are committed to driving as much funding as possible where it is needed most – to the classroom. We will continue to



focus our efforts on providing a solid basic education foundation for Washington students.

■ **Higher Education**

Republican and Democrat legislators from every corner of Washington agree that the state’s budget crisis could have a serious impact on our higher education system. Where we tend to part ways, however, is in how to address this crisis. Although we believe that everything, including higher education, must be on the table during budget discussions, we also understand that an educated workforce is crucial in building a strong economy. With enrollment on the rise and the cost of higher education becoming less affordable for middle-income families, we will fight to ensure students have access to higher education at affordable tuition rates. To that end, we will be working to clarify the role that branch campuses and community colleges play in our overall higher education system.



■ **WSU Vet funding**

The quality of students graduating from the WSU College of Veterinary Medicine is well known. The demand for WSU veterinary graduates is near an all-time high with most new veterinarians leaving college with multiple job offers.

In the words of WSU President V. Lane Rawlins, “veterinary medicine has been at the heart of WSU’s identity and excellence for 103 years.”

Unfortunately, a recent announcement by Oregon State University puts the program in jeopardy. OSU notified WSU that it would withdraw from its 23-year agreement of sending OSU veterinary students to WSU’s campus. OSU had been sending 36 students to Pullman each fall and paid WSU for their educational costs. The announcement represents a loss of 64 full-time students and creates a \$2.4 million shortfall at the College of Veterinary Medicine.

We will look closely at this development to see what can be done to assist the College of Veterinary Medicine.

2003 legislative calendar

Monday, Jan. 13 – First day of session

Wednesday, March 5 – Deadline for bills to be passed out of House committees

Monday, March 10 – Deadline for bills to clear House fiscal committees

Wednesday, March 19 – Deadline for House passage of bills originating in the House

Friday, April 4 – Deadline for passage of Senate bills by House committees

Monday, April 7 – Deadline to pass Senate bills out of House fiscal committees

Friday, April 18 – Deadline to pass all bills out of both the House and Senate

Sunday, April 27 – Session adjourns (sine die)